DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 155 588 CS 004 069

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TITLE SOB: Selection of Basals.
PUB DATE 77
NOTE 13p.; First Published in "New England Reading Association Journal," Volume 12, Number 2, 1977

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Basic Reading; Elementary Education; Evaluation Criteria; *Reading Materials; *Reading Material Selection; *Reading Programs; *Textbook Evaluation

ABSTRACT

The evaluation and selection of basal reading materials should be a thorough process that ensure the success of the school's reading program. The ten areas of a basal series that should be made priorities, weighted, and evaluated include the skills programs, composition and readability, concepts, balance, literary value, testing program, teacher's manual, supplementary materials, field testing, and publisher's reputation. (A sample evaluation form shows how to use these criteria in rating and comparing several basal series at one time.) (RL)

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SOB: SELECTION OF BASALS

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SOB: SELECTION OF BASALS *

SOB or the selection of basal readers is an annual occurence in schools. There are several approaches to SOB. The first may be called the "flip-a-coin" approach. People using this approach place two basals before themselves, look at the pictures, then "flip-a-coin" before making the final decision. A second procedure might be called "pay-homage-to-the-publisher." Persons using this approach purchase materials on the recommendation of the publisher's representative. People using the third procedure, or "probe-in-the-dark" approach, know that they should be evaluating something, but do not know what to evaluate. The final procedure may be called the "critical-eye" approach; in short, knowing what to evaluate and making a thorough evaluation of materials before purchasing them.

Before selecting a basal series, a committee should do some preliminary work such as identifying school and community goals, assessing district wide reading needs, identifying the areas in which there is a gap between what actually is and what has been determined should be, and identifying resources and constraints affecting the attainment

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* First published in New England Reading Association Journal, Vol. 12, No. 2, 1977.

of these goals. The committee also sets priorities for textbook selection and evaluates reading materials. Reading materials should be evaluated in terms of priorities set by this committee.

The committee might use an instrument, such as the one included in this article, to guarantee as successful as possible a choice of basal. Of course no one can absolutely guarantee the success of any basal reader, but there are ten areas which may be prioritized, weighted and evaluated in relation to <u>your</u> students and staff:

1. Skills Program
2. Composition and Readability
3. Concepts
4. Balance
5. Literary Value
6. Testing Program
7. Teacher's Manual
8. Supplementary Materials
9. Field Testing
10. Publisher's Reputation.

Let's look at what is included in each of these areas.

1. <u>Skills Program</u>.

Skills should be presented sequentially with adequate reinforcement and reviewed periodically. Also, the number of new skills introduced in a lesson should be commensurate with the ability of your students to learn them.

One method for ascertaining the scope, sequence and reinforcement of skills is to use the publisher's scope and sequence chart and index of

skills for each level. (This index is usually found in the teacher's edition to the workbook or textbook.) Write the number of pages on which the skill is reinforced under the appropriate level on the scope and sequence chart. You can circle the page numbers found in the index on which fewer than 40% of the examples reinforce the skill.

For those who have the time, there is a second method for determining the sequence, rate of introduction, and reinforcement of skills. Make four columns on a sheet of paper. In the first column, list each skill and the page number on which it is introduced. In the second column, list the manual pages on which the skill is reviewed. In the third column, list the pages in the workbook; and in the fourth column list the number of any ditto master on which the skill is reinforced. As a further check, place an asterisk next to the pages on which fewer than 40% of the examples reinforce the specific skill. Figure 1 is an example of how this page might look.

SERIES: _____ BOOK TITLE: _____

LEVEL: _____

Skill Introduced	Reinforcement in manual	Reinforcement in workbook	Reinforcement on Ditto Masters
Schwa sound of a (ago), p. 207	228	49, 57*	25

Figure 1. Worksheets for skills introduction and reinforcement.

When this is complete you will have a scope and sequence of skills and you will know how well the skills are reinforced.

2. Composition and Readability.

A number of guidelines should be considered when judging the composition of selections presented in basal readers. Determine if the sentence patterns are such that students are able to comprehend the material. Look at the selection lengths at each level. Are their lengths such that student interest will be maintained? Finally, the readabilities of materials should progress sequentially without "gaps" between levels.

To determine the readability of the materials, use one of the available readability formulas. Spache, Dale-Chall and Fry are examples of available formulas.

3. Concepts.

View the concepts presented at each level in relation to the experiental background and interests of students in your school and community. The content of beginning readers should center on the experiences of your students. If story situations are completely outside the realm of students' experiences, comprehension will be more difficult. Finally, is the vocabulary load commensurate with the ability of your students to learn, and is there adequate repetition of these vocabulary words?

4. Balance.

Racial and sexual groups should not be relegated to positions of inferior status in basial readers. Racial stereotyping should be avoided. And, a variety of minority groups should be represented in basals with minority groups being represented as main characters.

There should be sexual balance in readers. Males and females should be shown in non-stereotypic activities. And, women should be shown working outside the home.

5. Literary Value.

Programs should provide examples of good literature, and there should be a wide variety of literature throughout the series. Sports, adventure, travel, nature, art, newspaper articles, fairytales, mythology, fables, poetry, drama, biography, animal stories, science, history and music are areas which might be represented in a series. Also, original works by children's authors should be included.

6. Testing Program.

Because success in one level is dependent upon mastery of the previous one, good diagnostic instruments should be available for teacher use. More specifically, what instruments are available to help teachers assess readiness, skills mastery and level mastery? Furthermore, do these tests actually test the skills they are designed to test?

7. Teacher's Manual.

While most people will agree that there is no substitute for a good teacher, few good teachers will deny that a good teacher's manual is an invaluable aid. The evaluator may look for the following elements when evaluating the teacher's manual:

- Does the teacher's manual provide suggestions for enriching and expanding the basal program?
- Does the manual provide suggestions for meeting individual needs and differences?
- Does the manual state behavioral objectives?
- Is oral reading to students included as a part of each lesson?
- Does the manual suggest stories which may be read aloud to students?
- Does the manual provide lists of supplementary books which students

should be able to read on their own?

8. Supplementary Materials.

Teachers do not have the time to develop each needed worksheet, transparency or cassette tape needed for teaching. As a result, a wide variety of materials should be available to help teachers meet the needs of students.

9. Field Testing.

Publishers should field test their materials before selling them to the public and should provide this information upon request. In viewing test data, one might consider whether the materials had undergone study with learners similar to those in your community or school. Has the company had independent investigations undertaken to measure students' comprehension and mastery of skills taught in the program? Has data been provided to show achievement with regard to socioeconomic status, age and grade?

10. Publisher's Reputation.

Is the publisher's reputation one of responsibility and service? The publisher should provide consulting services, deliver materials on time, and have a representative available to answer your questions and to set up meetings with company consultants.

The following evaluation form may be used by committees when selecting basal readers. The evaluation instrument is arranged to allow evaluators to compare specific grade level readers from three different series on the same instrument. While a four-point rating scale is recommended, committee members should decide which areas and factors are the most important in terms of their children, school, staff and grade

levels. These factors should then be weighted accordingly. What is a priority item for one school, may not be a priority for the next.

* * * *

EVALUATION INSTRUMENT FOR BASAL READERS

GRADE LEVEL: _____

Series A: _____ Title & level: _____

Series B: _____ Title & level: _____

Series C: _____ Title & level: _____

Directions: Score either 4, 3, 2 or 1 after the factors listed.

4 = excellent, 3 = good, 2 = fair, 1 = poor.

	SCORE		
	A	B	C
SKILLS PROGRAM			
Reinforcement of readiness skills	__	__	__
Reinforcement of phonetic skills	__	__	__
Reinforcement of structural analysis skills	__	__	__
Reinforcement of comprehension skills	__	__	__
Reinforcement of study skills	__	__	__
Sub Total:	__	__	__
COMPOSITION & READABILITY			
Sentence patterns similar to speech of children....	__	__	__
Sentence patterns such that students are able to comprehend material	__	__	__
Selection lengths such that student interest will be maintained	__	__	__
Readability at grade level	__	__	__
Sub Total:	__	__	__

CONCEPTS

Concepts related to interests of students	___	___	___
Vocabulary load commensurate with ability of students to learn	___	___	___
Adequate repetition of vocabulary	___	___	___
Sub Total:	___	___	___

BALANCE

Racial groups are not relegated to inferior status	___	___	___
Racial stereotyping is avoided	___	___	___
More than one minority group is represented	___	___	___
Minorities represented as main characters	___	___	___
Sexual groups not relegated to inferior posititons..	___	___	___
Males shown in non-stereotyping activities	___	___	___
Females shown in non-stereotyping activities.....	___	___	___
Sub Total:	___	___	___

LITERARY VALUE

A wide variety of literature is present	___	___	___
Original works by children's authors included	___	___	___
Selections are of interest to students	___	___	___
Sub Total:	___	___	___

TESTING PROGRAM

Pre-screening readiness test	___	___	___
Group placement test	___	___	___
Informal Reading Inventory	___	___	___
Criterion referenced vocabulary tests	___	___	___

Criterion referenced decoding tests ..... ___ ___ ___

Criterion referenced comprehension tests ..... ___ ___ ___

Criterion referenced study skills tests ..... ___ ___ ___

End of unit tests ..... ___ ___ ___

End of text tests ..... ___ ___ ___

Sub Total: ___ ___ ___

TEACHER'S MANUAL

Provides background to arouse interest in selections ..... ___ ___ ___

Guided silent reading ..... ___ ___ ___

Guided oral reading ..... ___ ___ ___

Suggestions for enriching and expanding basal program ..... ___ ___ ___

Suggestions for meeting individual differences ... ___ ___ ___

Manual states behavioral objectives ..... ___ ___ ___

Reading aloud to students included as part of each lesson ..... ___ ___ ___

Suggests stories which may be read aloud to students ..... ___ ___ ___

Suggests stories students may read independently .. ___ ___ ___

Provides lists of supplementary books students may read independently ..... ___ ___ ___

Sub Total: ___ ___ ___

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

Games ..... ___ ___ ___

Flashcards ..... ___ ___ ___

Supplementary Readers ..... ___ ___ ___

Ditto Masters ..... ___ ___ ___

Cassette Tapes ..... ___ ___ ___

Records ..... ___ ___ ___

Transparencies ..... ___ ___ ___

Sub Total: ___ ___ ___

FIELD TESTING

Has undergone study with learners similar to your students ..... ___ ___ ___

Independent investigations of materials have been undertaken ..... ___ ___ ___

Sub Total: ___ ___ ___

PUBLISHER'S REPUTATION

One of responsibility and service ..... ___ ___ ___

Consulting services available ..... ___ ___ ___

Materials delivered on time ..... ___ ___ ___

Representative available ..... ___ ___ ___

Sub Total: ___ ___ ___

The previous instrument has the advantage of allowing one to evaluate and compare three series on the same instrument. Ten areas may be evaluated by using the various criterion factors for each. Finally, no "absolutes" were identified or suggested. Evaluators may select priority items and weigh them accordingly. And, different weights may be given to similar items at different grade levels.

* * * *

If the foregoing process of evaluation appears to be an awesome task, one only needs to think of the money spent purchasing basal programs, and the problems and SOBS which may arise from their use if careful evaluation is not undertaken. Why not evaluate thoroughly and put the odds for having a successful reading program on your side?